

# A Framework for Eliminating Health Disparities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

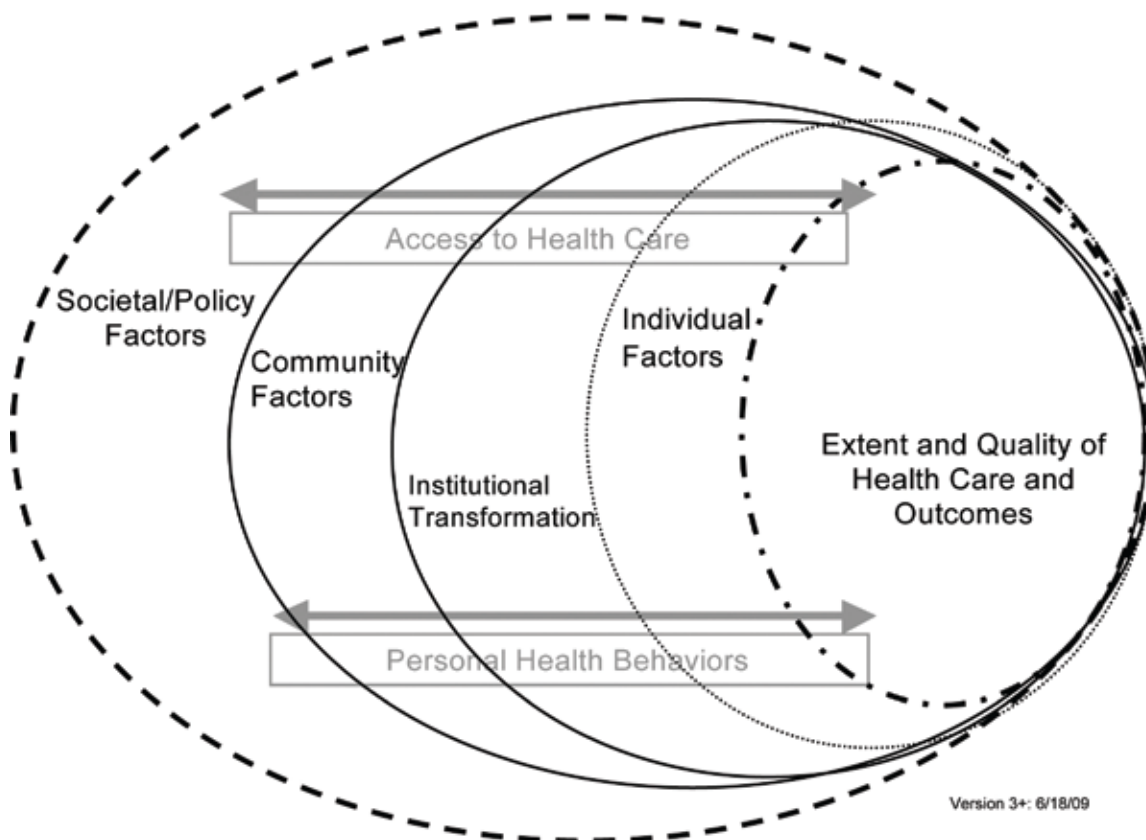
In 2006, as part of Massachusetts' groundbreaking Health Care Reform Law, the Health Disparities Council (the Council) was established. Our mission is to identify and recommend policies and actions to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health and healthcare outcomes and to achieve health equity for all Massachusetts residents.

In order to guide this monumental and complex mission, the Council has adopted a framework which will assist us in planning, implementing, and evaluating our future work. What follows is a description of the framework, organized around six objective areas that influence both access to health-care and personal health behaviors (See Figure):

1. Adopt Social Policies that Increase Equity
2. Promote Healthy Communities
3. Promote Institutional Transformation
4. Promote Provider Transformation
5. Promote Healthy Individual Behaviors
6. Improve Access to and Quality of Healthcare and Health Outcomes

Each objective along with a scope of activity is described below. Collectively, these objectives constitute the framework for a comprehensive approach to improving the health of and eliminating health disparities among people of color.

## Framework for Addressing Health Disparities



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### 1 **Adopt Social Policies That Increase Equity**

The residents of Massachusetts deserve to live healthy, prosperous lives free from violence, racism, want and disease. Society sets about constructing and insuring those conditions for its members through policies of its state and municipal governments. The Council seeks to develop policies that equitably improve the health of its residents, particularly people of color in often socially disadvantaged communities. These policies should increase access to positive environmental conditions and provide economic and educational opportunities for all ages while permitting people to live in healthy housing and neighborhoods. These policies must also respect individual cultural, religious and ethnic systems of behavior and belief.

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### 2 **Promote Healthy Communities**

Community is the level of society at which people live their daily lives. Community level supports to health include adequate sources of healthy food, safe neighborhoods and a built environment which promotes physical activity. In addition, residents need easy access to good jobs and schooling. Improving community level access to health requires the establishment of mechanisms for community input and mobilization to guide the development of locally relevant barrier-reduction strategies.

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### 3 **Promote Institutional Transformation**

Institutions are places where we work, worship, learn or receive treatment. These institutions are accountable to meeting community needs and contributing to societal and individual health. Institutional transformation requires entities to align their core values and deliver services to promote health equity. Transformation includes, but is not limited to, representation/diversity at all levels within an institution, equitable pay and advancement, increased access to and opportunities for learning, bridging resources between communities to overcome geographic and/or social isolation, and equitable distribution of resources.

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### 4 **Promote Provider Transformation**

Providers of healthcare services, including healthcare institutions, healthcare educators, licensed healthcare practitioners and others, have a direct impact on health inequities and disparities. Provider transformation includes incorporation of linguistically and culturally competent licensed healthcare practitioners. Cultural awareness and sensitivity in the provider community must be advanced and permeate throughout the delivery system to reduce disparities and improve outcomes for all populations.

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### 5 **Promote Healthy Individual Behaviors**

Healthy behavior does not occur in a vacuum. Factors that impact individual health outcomes are present in society and its communities and may be influenced by individual knowledge and personally held beliefs. Consequently, successful interventions that improve individual health may first require implementation of programs and policies that address health disparities at the societal, community and institutional levels. Through such interventions, individuals and families should be afforded the proper tools to live healthy lifestyles, access preventative care, treatment of chronic disease and the education to make good judgments about their health and healthcare.

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### 6 **Improve Access to and Quality of Healthcare and Health Outcomes**

Barriers such as health insurance, social stigma, cultural competence and fractured delivery systems contribute to the problem of disparities in healthcare. Improving access to healthcare is dependent on numerous factors including the availability of appropriate clinical services, workforce competence, financial payer mechanisms and geographic location. Assessment of entities involved in healthcare delivery (i.e. physical, mental, visual and dental) must be conducted to increase existing levels of cultural competency within the institution and among providers, locate opportunities to reduce costs due to duplication of efforts and improve health outcomes among patient populations.